

House Bill 38
Tuesday, January 9, 2007
Presented by Chris Smith
House Fish, Wildlife & Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chris Smith, Chief of Staff of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks supports House Bill 38 as it provides increased ability to manage big horn sheep, moose, and bison in Montana. Montana generally has robust big horn sheep populations with several management units currently over objective. For sheep in particular, high population levels are associated with disease and die-off concerns. Trap and transplant efforts have been a core element of population control with nearly 200 sheep slated for trap and transplant this winter. However, limited release site availability and trapping costs may constrict future ability to reliably match trap and transplant opportunity with management need. While ewe harvest represents another piece of population control, it currently does not enjoy broad hunter participation. The 2005 license fee adjustment from \$75 to \$125 further reduced hunter interest, and some successful applicants returned their license and requested a refund this year. By adding the ewe sheep license to the existing list of licenses the FWP Commission may annually reduce prices for game management circumstances, this legislation affords pricing flexibility to cultivate and maintain sufficient hunter participation rates relative to prescribed harvest. Antlerless moose and cow/calf bison are included in this legislation for the same fundamental reasons. Additionally, this proposal exempts ewe sheep licenses and antlerless moose from the existing 7-year waiting period for special licenses. The current 7-year waiting period deters many hunters from even applying to hunt ewe big horn sheep. For sheep, this legislation would also allow allocation of more than one ewe license per individual in the same year, similar to doe/fawn antelope or antlerless deer.

HB 38 will enable the Department to manage ungulate populations more precisely. We urge the committee's support of this bill.